

Comradely Critique

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Abstract

What does it mean to disagree with people with whom you usually agree? How should political actors concerned with emancipation approach internal disagreement? In short, how should we go about critiquing not our enemies or adversaries but those with whom we share emancipatory visions? I outline the notion of *comradely critique* as a solution to these questions. I go through a series of examples of how and when critique should differ depending on its addressee, drawing on Jodi Dean's figure of the comrade. I develop a contrast with its neighbours the ally and the partisan, thus identifying key elements of comradely critique: good faith, equal humanity, equal standing, solidarity, collaboration, common purpose and dispelling fatalism. I then analyse Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse's private correspondence on the 1960s German student movement as an illustration of (imperfect) comradely critique. I conclude by identifying a crucial tension about publicness and privateness.

Keywords

critique, comradeship, comradely critique, partisanship, allyship, critical theory, Adorno, Marcuse

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Introduction

We need to learn, or re-learn, how to build comradeship and solidarity instead of doing capital's work for it by condemning and abusing each other. This doesn't mean, of course, that we must always agree – on the contrary, we must create conditions where disagreement can take place without fear of exclusion and excommunication (Fisher, 2013).

Deep disagreement is a central concern in the scholarly literature. However, an important overlooked focus is not fundamental disagreement but momentary or limited disagreement – that is, between people who usually or mostly agree. The form of such disagreement depends on its addressee. Disagreement aiming to persuade – in the form of critique – must differ depending on whether it is aimed at political adversaries, the general public or fellow travellers. Critique addressed at those within a 'political relation . . . for action toward a common goal' of 'sameness, equality, and

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solidarity' (Dean, 2019: 71), what I call *comradely critique*, requires a different approach than neutral or hostile critique. This term is frequently used in activist circles and can inform the work of critical theorists and activists alike, yet has not been given much scholarly attention. While certain intersections and parallels exist with the distinctions between negative and positive critique, immanent and transcendental critique, or internal and external critique, comradely critique does not neatly map onto such dichotomies. Therefore, a theorisation of comradely critique is required to understand how comrades do, can and should criticise each other.

Within an informal affinity group, a formal political party, a social movement or a scholarly tradition, like-minded individuals form collectives but do not agree on everything. Sometimes disagreements can be over minutiae and thus not a significant obstacle, other times they can be so fundamental that they splinter and dissolve the group. In between, however, are substantial disagreements that go beyond mere minutiae but do not immediately lead to dissolution. In extension of such intra-group disagreement, a perhaps even more frequent and important type is inter-group disagreement. Such disagreement emerges between rather than within groups, for example, distinct yet aligned social movements or scholars from different traditions who are sympathetic to each other's projects but who nevertheless disagree on important questions.

This brings an affective and prefigurative dimension to critique, highlighting how treating one's comrades in an appropriate way is fundamental to the larger shared political project. Affects, understood as collectively inflected social emotions, play a major role in comradeship or camaraderie. As I show below, being a comrade is not just about sharing a particular kind of politics but is also an affective bond of a certain attitude towards one's fellow comrades: indeed, it is a social relation. This does not mean, however, that it stands in opposition to reason or rationality, which play key roles as well. Rather, the strict division between these two ostensible opposites must be problematised. A lot of radical political action sits *between* or even beyond reason and affect. The intensity of feeling between comrades does and should inflect critique in particular ways, because there is an affective bond that ties together comrades beyond their momentary disagreements. This is what makes possible comradely critique in the first place and part of what distinguishes it from other conventional types of critique.

Here, theorists can learn from Mihaela Mihai's (2019: 583) account of responsible and responsive theorising where 'responsible theorizing refers to reflective, self-critical conceptual practices . . . whereas responsiveness is an ethical requirement that should inform philosophers' orientation to the vulnerable people they study'. While Mihai is concerned with such theorising about vulnerable subjects, that is, subalterns who do not have an equal voice, it offers lessons for comradely critique too. Comradely critique should aspire to similar responsibility and responsiveness – recognising its own limits and embodying a degree of intellectual humility in meeting one's comrade as an equal worthy of respect. While "giving oneself up for the cause" brings certain dangers, decentring oneself in favour of the collective offers a promising guideline for comrades in how to formulate their critique that does not fall prey to neoliberal subjectivation and methodological individualism. Scholars interested in affect and political emotions will no doubt be able to contribute further to this conversation on various forms of critique and might want to use this article as a springboard.

In this article, I first explain why we need comradely critique, suggesting it offers resources for how emancipatory movements can navigate disagreement. Second, I explain what a comrade is, distinguishing it from the ally and the partisan. Third, I develop a vision

of what comradely critique involves, pointing to three key components: (1) acting from good faith, equal humanity and equal standing; (2) embodying solidarity, collaboration and common purpose; and (3) dispelling fatalism. Fourth, I illustrate an (imperfect) example of comradely critique – the private correspondence between Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse on how to judge the 1960s German student movement, showing how comradely critique must reckon with the importance of publicness and privateness in how critique is formulated. This offers an interesting example to illustrate an example of disagreement between otherwise aligned positions that is nevertheless substantial.

Why Do We Need Comradely Critique?

Comradely critique offers resources for emancipatory social movements and studying it helps scholars understand practices of disagreement within political organisational cultures. Furthermore, theorising comradely critique offers an opportunity to bring together the strongest contributions of both deliberative democrats and radical democrats. In particular, it can bring together the value of shared deliberation with the acknowledgement that deliberation can obstruct and/or obscure political contestation. Conventionally, these are seen as oppositional positions, but in comradely critique they come together. While deliberative democrats endeavour to find a foundation for consensus, radical democrats emphasise the ineradicable role of disagreement in democratic politics. When changing the focus from the societal level to momentary instances of disagreement, however, these need not be irreconcilable.

One way to understand and potentially overcome the problem of such internal disagreement between two parties who share a basic commitment to the idea of emancipation is through the idea of comradely critique. This term is frequently used in activist circles but has not been explored in the academic literature. Only a very limited number of texts explicitly undertake comradely critique (Clough, 2014; Das, 2017; Gunn and Wilding, 2012; Herod, 2013). What is more, there is no sustained reflection on what the idea means. Raju Das defines comradely critique simply as the critique of purportedly anti-capitalist positions that nevertheless reinforce capitalist structures (Das, 2017: 530), that is, pointing out to fellow comrades that they have taken a wrong position on a particular issue. Yet this seems to only be a small subsection of the broader idea and eludes meta-level reflection on its meaning.

I theorise comradely critique as a way of addressing the problem of critique depending at least in part on who its addressee. When critiquing a comrade, such critique can be formulated differently than when critiquing an adversary or even an enemy. This is for two main reasons: first, because the underlying shared set of commitments means there is a baseline agreement that need not first be defended and protected. Instead, the disagreement can proceed from the mutual presumption of being on the same side – of being comrades. The existence of a shared overall goal or aim, but a disagreement on strategy or the interpretation of this overall goal, means that the critique serves a different function than the attempt to either win the opponent over to one's own side of the struggle or to emphasise the disagreement so as to make them look bad in public, or some other aim.

Second, because we might have special obligations towards those with whom we are engaged in shared struggles. Michael Walzer famously defended a duty to disobey the law in cases where the *pro tanto* obligation to obey the law conflicts with obligations towards those we are affiliated with in a political or social struggle (Walzer, 1967). This means that certain kinds of expectations can be placed on comrades to act in certain

ways. In other words, there is a legitimate presumption of treating a comrade like someone who deserves special care and concern. Comrades look out for one another in ways that others do not, and in a way that they do not for non-comrades. This means that comradely critique is not just social but intersubjective because it concerns both the way that critique is delivered and received; it places a certain political responsibility on the comrade to behave and act in a particular way. Comrades rightfully demand things of each other and should be criticised when they fail. This is in contrast to monadic or monastic individuals who criticise from abstract positions of purported scientific objectivity or what Max Horkheimer refers to as ‘traditional theory’ (Horkheimer, 2002). Comradely critique thus helps theorise the thorny subject of disagreement in relation to the need for emancipatory social change. By focusing on how to critique those with whom one usually agrees and shares a larger political project, political theorists can gain clarity on an underappreciated type of critique, despite the vast literature on different types of critique. This requires briefly turning to the various forms critique can take, before turning specifically to the figure of the comrade.

Critique

Having outlined the overall appeal of comradely critique, I now contrast this with alternative approaches. Critique can be understood in a plethora of ways, including everyday, reason-driven or problematising (Geuss, 2002); constructive or negative (Geuss, 2014); positive or negative (Postone, 1996: 90); measuring, disrupting or emancipating (Vogelmann, 2017); disclosing (Honneth, 2000); realist (Prinz and Rossi, 2017) or idealist (Rawls, 2005); post-foundational (Marchart, 2007) or socially grounded (McNay, 2014); immanent (Stahl, 2013) or transcendental (Kant, 1998); social practical (Celikates, 2018); radical or contextualist (Thaler, 2012); or genealogical (Foucault, 1977) critique. Many of these overlap in certain ways and mostly share a common ground in challenging existing positions and claims, yet the more precise configuration and content of critique is subject to vociferous debate. Indeed, Geuss (2014: 70) claims that ‘there is no *single* invariable notion of “criticism,” which could be the object of strict formal definition, giving necessary and sufficient conditions’.

Because negative critique starts from what exists and that existing society is already marked by social contradictions, for instance, in the relationship between classes or in the way that the environment is exploited leading to catastrophic climate change which then undermines the mode of production, a negative critique is already attuned to these contradictions. Positive critique, on the contrary, remains trapped within the need for offering concrete solutions to concrete problems in a way that easily collapses into bourgeois morality. If a positive critique ‘criticizes what *is* on the basis of *what also is* and, hence, does not really point beyond the existent totality’ whereas negative critique ‘is not undertaken on the basis of what *is* but of what *could be*’ (Postone, 1996: 90), then comradely critique does both of these simultaneously: it is equally concerned with what is and what could be. This is possible because it is liberated from the problem of getting caught up in a basic disagreement over the fundamentals.

Most approaches to critique disagree on the undergirding norms or function of such critique, that is, what it should seek to do or achieve. In contrast to such approaches, I neither establish new or different norms, nor do I establish a new function of critique. Instead, my aim is more modest: *How should we go about critiquing not our enemies or adversaries but those with whom we share emancipatory visions?* An underappreciated

element is attention to the recipient of the critique. The closest is Frieder Vogelmann (2017: 101):

Today's debate about critique is a debate about the normativity of critique. What norms does critique presuppose, where do they come from, and how can they transcend the contemporary normative horizon? . . . Lost from sight is the activity of criticizing [and] the activity of the theorists themselves.

In other words, such debates pay scant attention to the very act of criticising and what that means.

The focus on norms obfuscates the social relations involved in the act of criticising because it abstracts from the context and affective bonds that structure such critique in the first place:

All (theoretical) talk about critique relies on pictures describing the activity that critique is supposed to be. These picture [*sic*] are not mere metaphors: they orient theories of critique because they subtly predispose how critique is (supposed to be) done and what does not count as critique (Vogelmann, 2017: 101).

Comradely critique is thus contrasted with neutral and hostile critique, where neutral critique is the ostensibly dispassionate and 'objective' attempt at criticising from nowhere, while hostile critique is the more aggressive and negative critique that does not necessarily attempt to persuade but simply seeks to harden pre-existing support. In short, the subject of critique and the recipient of the critique matter for how it should be formulated and structured. Universalising and generalising critique irrespective of its recipient might make that critique less powerful.

As an example, consider Extinction Rebellion (XR), the direct action and civil disobedience-focused environmental social movement that emerged in 2018. Averting climate disaster is one of the most pressing political issues of our time. Direct action to push for more action against climate disaster is generally good as it pushes lawmakers towards action and raises the consciousness of people to think and do more about climate change. I might feel an affinity with direct action climate activists in general; I might even consider them my comrades. However, I might also disagree with the action in October 2019 of blocking a commuter train to protest fossil fuel emissions, causing working-class people to miss work shifts, as a politically sound strategy for highlighting climate change. I might also think that more radical direct action is needed instead, for instance, eco-sabotage and property destruction (Malm, 2021). Unless politics is reduced to shouting into a void, my response to such an action is contextual, however. If my climate change-denying, conservative grandmother calls me after she has seen the action on TV, what should I say? If 5 minutes after getting off the call, I get another call from someone I organise with in a housing action network or a trade union or a social movement – a comrade – and they ask what I think of the action, what should I say? Should I say the same thing to my grandmother and my comrade?

I think not. To my grandmother, a blanket rejection of the action might simply reinforce her view that the climate justice movement is unworthy of support. A better approach might be to reinforce that action is needed, and that in any case the action itself is merely one of many kinds of action taking place. The purpose here might be to slightly win over my grandmother towards a more sympathetic position vis-à-vis the climate justice movement. She does not care about whether it is working-class people or others inconvenienced

by the action – in short, her problem is climate militancy. It is safe to assume we will not be able to find common ground on climate change during a phone call. What matters is to not feed her pre-existing prejudice but to perhaps simply shine new light on the issue. Say that even if the action seems somewhat misguided, the urgency of climate change for my and future generations means that we must do more, even if that means sometimes we do not pick the exact right options. The crucial point to get across is to focus on the broader issue of climate change rather than the particulars of the wrong action. When I respond to my comrade calling me, I can be much more candid – I might criticise the action on the grounds that climate action should go hand-in-hand with worker solidarity. Since we have a pre-established bond of comradeship, in which we both agree on the importance of climate justice and worker power, we do not need to convince anyone of these basic points. Instead, we can disagree on the particulars, debating how and why the action might not be the right means to our agreed-upon end.

Consider I get a third call, this time from an old friend who is now active in XR – who might now also be a comrade – and was part of the action to block the train. What do I tell them? Because I am challenging them in private, I can be more critical than if I was publicly challenging the problem of the action. Yet this does not mean that I should not adhere to the comradely ethos I set out below. Now consider a fourth instance: I am giving a live-streamed public lecture on social movements. In the Q&A, one student wearing an antifascist t-shirt derides the action as politically ineffective bourgeois performative activism. Another student with a ‘climate change isn’t real’ sticker on their laptop criticises it as public disorder instigated by an extremist group who should be banned and jailed. Do I give the same answer to the antifascist student and the climate change-denying law and order student? Are either of these answers the same as in the preceding three examples?

I might want to provide a more positive view of XR to the law and order student in front of a big group than when my comrade calls me on the phone. If the person asking is already on board with the general value of protest and the importance of fighting climate change, I can proceed to a more negative critique that insists on how our shared goals are not best met by that particular action. Judging how to formulate the different responses thus depends on multiple factors: is the critique in the public domain or in private? Is it directed at a comrade or not? My wager here is that I should not say the same thing in all instances: my critique is contextual and depends on whether it is addressed to a comrade or not. It also depends on whether the critique is public or private, a point I return to at the end of this article. However, before developing these thoughts in detail, I now explain what the figure of the comrade is by first contrasting it to two related figures: the ally and the partisan. While these offer some promise in formulating comradely critique, they each suffer from shortcomings that the figure of the comrade can mend.

Three Figures of Friendly Critique: The Ally, the Partisan and the Comrade

Jodi Dean explains how the comrade is a ‘generic figure’ (Dean, 2019: 3) rather than a specific kind of person; thus, it is a ‘political relation . . . for action towards a common goal’ (Dean, 2019: 2) characterised by ‘sameness of those on the same side’ (Dean, 2019: 71). It does not imply sameness tout court, merely sameness in relation to the common goal. It is characterised by solidarity and collective action about a ‘shared vision for the

future', strong enough to go beyond 'one-off actions'. According to Dean (2019: 10), 'addressing another as "comrade" reminds them that something is expected of them' – echoing Walzer's claim about certain obligations we have towards fellow travellers. Dean thus contrasts the comrade to the ally. Let me first briefly explain 'the ally', and why they are insufficient for comradely critique.

The Ally

The figure of the ally is an external person who is sympathetic to a particular collective social identity and their struggles, but who ostensibly cannot and should not represent that identity. For example, white people who care about anti-racism can be allies, but not speak or act on behalf, of Black Lives Matter. Allyship implies the impossibility of genuine solidarity and comradeship because it reinforces existing identities as insurmountable. It does not begin from a claim about equality – the importance of which I expand on below – but from a fundamental point of inequality.

The ally suffers from a series of interrelated problems. It moralises and individualises political agency such that having clean hands and reifying personal identity become the *raison d'être* of politics. As Dean (2019: 17) points out, allyship:

takes the form of a how-to guide or list of pointers – how to be an ally, the dos and don'ts of allyship, and so on. Like eliminate-the-clutter books or tips for clean eating, the instructions for being a good ally are mini lifestyle manuals, techniques for navigating the neoliberal environment of privilege and oppression. Individuals can learn what not to say and what not to do. They can feel engaged, changing their feelings if not the world without taking power, without any organized political struggle at all. The 'politics' in these allyship how-tos consists of interpersonal interactions, individuated feelings, and mediated affects.

Thus, as Emma Dabiri argues, the guilt at the root of allyship is a poor basis for the politics of racial emancipation (Dabiri, 2021). Not only does it in fact re-centre white people and their feelings, it furthermore debilitates a politics of coalition whereby white and Black people unite in a shared struggle. Eluding the interconnectedness of struggles runs the risk of creating political silos. Coalition-building is a prime objective of emancipatory politics. Allyship thus hinges on an account of lived experience or even standpoint epistemology as trumping political commitments, whereby epistemic authority is the trump card of political valorisation.

The Partisan

The partisan is related yet distinct from the ally and has a long-standing place in scholarly debates (Gouldner, 1968; Hammersley, 2000; Urbinati, 2014; White and Ypi, 2010, 2016; Ypi, 2016). Ypi and White argue that commitment to a political party confers particular special considerations, such that this commitment in itself is the value of partisanship (White and Ypi, 2016: 4–5). In other words, by virtue of *committing* people to politics, and insofar as political commitment is a moral and political good because it implies engagement, involvement and participation, there is value in partisanship. This means that the partisan is someone who commits to a particular kind of politics and by extension commits to his or her fellow partisans. Thus, the contemporary figure of the partisan, in Ypi and White's view, shares the commitment to a party that we saw in Dean's figure of

the comrade. Yet, both partisan and comradely critique need not be tied to a party, however loosely this is defined. The commitment of both is what is at stake here. Comradely critique inflected with partisanship thus means elaborating on and re-emphasising such commitment. By working from a shared political commitment, comradely critique is able to get into the messy and dirty particulars which never get reached in a more general critique that seeks to have as wide appeal as possible. Just like Walzer shows that there can be special obligations towards ones fellow activists, Ypi and White show how the partisan has a commitment and is faithful towards particular interests (White and Ypi, 2010: 815).

The real merit of the partisan, according to Ypi (2016), is that their partisanship generates political engagement. This can be transposed onto comradely critique. Rather than dispassionate or disinterested objective truth-seeking as the task for critique, the affective and political investment of the critic is what gives rise to productive encounters and visions that bring increased clarity on the challenge of emancipation. One problem with critique that is not comradely is the tendency or risk of mistaking critical distance from disengagement. Sometimes being embedded and engaged in the object of critique – perhaps even *alongside* the object of the critique, that is, one's comrade – leads to a heightened ability to see the criticised person in more humanised terms and to find productive agreement. A major difference between the comrade and the partisan is therefore that the partisan does not necessarily see neutrals as potential partisans, whereas the comrade sees neutrals as potential comrades. In this sense, whereas the comrade is (ideally) outward-looking, the partisan is more inward-looking. Partisanship is thus about reinforcing internal loyalty whereas comradeship is about commitment to a cause that potentially anyone could join. The particulars of how to do this, however, requires returning from the figure of the partisan to the figure of the comrade.

The Comrade

The comrade (seeks to) transcend these categories and build a politics that can abolish the oppressive conditions of capitalist society – alliances rather than allyship. While the ally is individualised and atomised, the comrade is collective and cooperative. The purpose is to get your hands dirty and change the world, not wash your hands and be at peace with oneself. The partisan does have the same aspirations as the comrade but does not focus on the coalition-building of solidarity that Dabiri emphasises. Comrades are united by their shared commitment to a particular kind of vision and world that goes beyond mere party affiliation. All it takes to be a comrade is a commitment to and interest in 'emancipatory egalitarian struggles' (Dean, 2019: 59). Indeed, the comrade 'affirms something more ambiguous – anyone could be a comrade' (Dean, 2019: 73). Only once the comrade descends into classification based on 'nationality, ethnicity, or race' is the figure no longer useful. Yet when ostensible comrades stop behaving in a way that is conducive to shared interest, they undermine their professed political goals – they stop being comrades. To be a comrade is thus about more than merely shared interest, it also concerns a particular kind of good behaviour – comrades can expect something of each other, a certain kind of solidarity.

Indeed, there are four key components to a comrade, according to Dean (2019: 80). First, the comrade is 'characterized by sameness, equality, and solidarity'. This precludes reactionary nationalist movements or far-right groups from claiming the mantle of comradeship because they do not commit to equality. Rather, their entire purpose is to

demarcate lines of division and exclusion which perpetuate relations of inequality. Likewise, a confederation of business leaders in capitalist society is not a relation of comrades, because they, too, operate from a premise of exploitation and profiteering at the expense of, for example, workers, nature or non-human animals. Solidarity implies a reciprocal relationship beyond individual self-interest, such that collective and group interest means the individual is willing to sacrifice certain things for the greater good. This is the basic premise of activism – devotion to a cause that does not immediately benefit the activist. However, as I consider below, certain dangers arise from a pretence of solidarity, namely, the pursuit of self-aggrandisement and self-centred positioning.

Second, the comrade is ‘generic, equalizing, and open to any but not all’ (Dean, 2019: 80). The fact that potentially anyone can become a comrade is crucial, since it means that at any given moment, a non-comrade can become a comrade. The implications of this are vast: by treating (at least some) non-comrades as potential comrades, they might more easily be won over as comrades. Dismissing political opponents as fallen from grace and beyond salvation is as politically defeatist as it is uncomradely. Rather, opponents can become comrades through the existence of shared collective interests. Comradeship is not just a working-class relation – even if the ultimate aim for comrades should be emancipation from capitalism.

Third, the comrade is ‘a relation, not an individual identity’ (Dean, 2019: 80). This means that it is not possible to be a comrade in isolation from others. Having the “correct” political views is not sufficient for being a comrade. Such views must be accompanied by practice and action. Only through interaction with others does the comrade emerge. This also means that being a comrade is not a permanent state but one constantly in flux. Just like non-comrades can become comrades, a comrade can become a non-comrade by failing to live up to the demands of comradeship. This also moves the comrade away from the identity-based character of the ally towards a genuinely collaborative politics of social struggle which is not about attaining moral purity or virtue but of concrete material gains. Indeed, distinguishes the comrade from the militant: ‘The militant is a single figure fighting for a cause. That one is a militant tells us nothing about that one’s relation to others. The militant expresses political intensity, not political relationality’ Dean (2019: 78). The same holds for the partisan, who is akin to the militant. The comrade is therefore also driven by a kind of affective politics, whereby intimacy and vulnerability are cornerstones. These necessarily inflect critique as well, such that the idea of purportedly objective truth is not the aim of critique, rather a different kind of political, affective commitment.

Finally, therefore, comradeship is ‘mediated by fidelity to a truth’ (Dean, 2019: 80). Fidelity to truth is a long-standing commitment in activist and emancipatory politics (Livingston, 2017), present, for instance, in Mohandas Gandhi’s thought and practice. Likewise, Alan Badiou defends a militant commitment to the fidelity of truth as ‘pure conviction’ and ‘wholly subjective’, as Daniel Bensaïd (2004: 3) notes. Truth is thus a process and its ‘verification is a struggle of the many’ (Dean, 2019). Indeed, such truths do not simply refer to epistemic content about the universe or existence, however, but to concrete political, affective commitments. Hence, it is precisely in the multiplicity of possible interpretations and understandings of political events and developments that comradely critique emerges. If there was one decontested truth about politics, what would be needed is not so much critique as scientific inquiry. Political “truth” is a form of social knowledge based around processes rather than simple facts, with comrades emphasising the importance of *action* – learning while doing, figuring out what political truths are

important by exercising them, a trial-and-error heuristic sometimes more useful than abstract deliberation removed from social struggles (Fung, 2016; Sanders, 1997; Young, 2001). This can help spur ‘avant-garde political agency’ which ‘aims to refine the lens through which reality is observed, to articulate and interpret the concerns and commitments of one’s contemporaries, and to analyse current events with an eye to both critique and innovation’ (Ypi, 2012: 2). Indeed ‘the truth process builds a new body’ which is always collective (Dean, 2019: 83).

Fidelity to truth is thus a kind of political faith in a shared project and a different world (Slothuus, 2021). Such fidelity to truth is communal and does not emerge from personal experience or inclinations. Indeed, political truths emerge from collective political action. While comradely critique must operate in good faith about the intentions and motivations of the comrade who is being criticised, this is not a purely rational and reason-driven endeavour. Like truth, such faith is not only collective but also deeply affective (Slothuus, 2021). All sorts of affective commitments intersect with a more rationalistic model of discourse and disagreement. While emotion and passion refer to individual feelings, affects are collective. Thus, the relationship between comrades is not just based on a shared political commitment but on an affective bond, akin to but distinct from that of family, friends, allies or partisans. Crucially, however, a commitment to telling the truth and not lying, distorting reality, and manipulating must underscore critical activity among comrades.

Comradely Critique

Comradely critique is therefore distinct from a non-comradely ethos of critique. In this section, I highlight key features it should aspire to: first, comradely critique begins from a position of good faith that emphasises the equal humanity and equal standing of its parties. Second, following from this, it reiterates points of agreement to show basic solidarity and common purpose. Third, it dispels fatalism and encourages cooperation and action. While these should not be seen as a definition, they nevertheless embody some of the key principles undergirding this notion of comradely critique. A definition here is not helpful as it is in the very nature of critique, as well as its comradely variant, to disagree – rather than rigidly police the boundaries of the enterprise, comradely critique should itself be open to comradely critique. Definitions-first approaches limit the scope of inquiry and attempt to brush over disagreement (Gunnell, 2011; Thaler, 2018) and are not helpful for the exploratory and open-ended work I am doing here. Instead, I probe comradely critique as an idea and a practice rather than a definition.

Good Faith, Equal Humanity, Equal Standing

Comradely critique shares certain elements with the notion of “good faith” and “good faith critique”, insofar as the latter also emphasises a common cause and joint project underlying the critique. A good faith critique takes as its central task the shared goal of seeking to end exploitation and domination, and to strive for freedom and equality. Thus, critique, particularly in its comradely form, requires a form of faith. Gramscian faith is productive for emancipatory politics, and recently Pope Francis (2020) pointed to the connection between faith and solidarity, a common theme in the literature on religious social movements and faith-based activism (Thaut, 2009). In contrast, Simone De Beauvoir (2000) develops the notion of ‘bad faith’, which stands in opposition to such

good faith. Bad faith is the notion that one might forgo one's moral responsibility to strive for freedom, and succumb to the harmful expectations of outside society. De Beauvoir's work can bring an important ethical dimension to the present argument, yet is outside the scope of this article. Comradely critique can learn from this because in starting from a position of good faith, it focuses on political truth-seeking and the common humanity and equal standing of both sender and recipient.

Yet even good faith critique faces problems. It runs the risk of missing the affective and partisan elements (White and Ypi, 2016; Ypi, 2016) of such faith. A simple good faith critique is too committed to calm, dispassionate reason and rationality, which does not portray the full picture of why critics engage in criticism. Sometimes the affective register of activists and critics means the critique is both more powerful and not framed in the more conventional rationalist terms. This affective component is all the more reason why good faith cannot be the only criterion by which to formulate comradely critique. Instead, it must be supplemented with a commitment to – and expression of – the equal humanity and equal standing of the involved parties. Once these are incorporated, the affective dimension of comradely critique can become an advantage rather than a disadvantage.

The equal humanity of the parties involved in the critique means that the critic disavows finite answers and the privileging of closure in contrast to continually open discussion and deliberation. By breaking down a hierarchy of the critic being in an epistemically privileged position and reaffirming the equal epistemic and political standing of the two parties, this instantly helps not just deliver the critique but strengthen the comradely bond, too. This breaks with a crude standpoint epistemology and certain forms of intersectionality that are based on the privilege politics of epistemic hierarchies. Dean outlines the problems with this in her critique of allyship, which reifies difference and is based on individual identities rather than shared political purpose. Epistemic equality is thus not the claim that everyone has equal access to all political truths, but simply the idea that in principle all comrades can bring valuable knowledge and truth-claims to the table irrespective of their social identities. This both avoids reducing oppressed groups to their oppression and avoids a competitive oppression calculus that is not grounded in a shared struggle for emancipation of all.

Returning to Mark Fisher's opening words, condemnation and abuse are profoundly uncomradely as they trade in a kind of moralistic politics of activist capital, whereby the social standing of an activist or critic is improved by the sermonic practice of disavowal. Allowing others to fail and improve must be at the heart of comradely critique, which is why the critique is never final but constantly opens to reassessment. Indeed, admitting one's own failures is deeply comradely too. This epistemic humility means that the act of engagement and critique is always already a form of prefiguration of the kind of politics and world comrades want to inhabit. As Francesca Polletta (2002: viii) surmises, freedom might be an endless meeting: 'participatory decisionmaking can help activists build solidarity, innovate tactically, secure the leverage of political opinion, and develop enduring mechanisms of political accountability'.

The equal standing of the critic and the criticised is an instantiation of Dean's appeal to 'sameness' and 'equality'. Comrades take as their starting point such sameness in the sense that they are not unique or important as atomised individuals but gain their identity only by virtue of belonging to a (real or imagined) collective. Thus, I can address someone in a comradely critique who I have never met, never will meet and I might not know much about them as a person. As long as I know they are a comrade – because we share certain kinds of basic political convictions – they are deserving of certain kinds of

affinity. Equality is equally important here because it implies that even when there is a hierarchical relationship, for example, when the critic is in an inferior position in terms of power, prestige, wealth or otherwise, they nevertheless can be met on equal terms as equal partners in an exchange. This does not mean that they get a *carte blanche* to level unwarranted criticisms at their superiors, rather it means that epistemic humility is twinned with epistemic equality, and emerges from an affective bond of solidarity.

Solidarity, Collaboration and Common Purpose

Comrades criticise their comrades by reiterating points of agreement to show basic solidarity, collaboration and common purpose. A basic principle of solidarity is thus necessary for critique to be comradely, following on from Dean's argument that comradeship is characterised by 'solidarity'. This means that the critic identifies with the object – and subject – of critique a common purpose and a fundamental sense of cooperation. Solidarity also means a willingness in principle to give up one's self-interested desires and ambitions for the greater good of the cause. This does not mean subjecting oneself to any kind of torment or misery – it simply means putting others first; seeing beyond your nose. Perhaps a scathing critique leveraging a position of power is beneficial for one's private gain, or even for one's faction or side to win. Yet this is uncomradely because it breaks with solidarity. Solidarity, in this sense, is the idea of offering something without expecting something immediate in return, yet basing this on a shared mutual interest. This separates it from altruism or charity, which are either fully self-disregarding or ultimately self-regarding. Solidarity, on the contrary, is ultimately self-interested insofar as that self-interest is also the interest of others.

Collaboration is crucial here. It would be a mistake to see the kind of solidaristic behaviour and attitude above as a utility maximising instrumental and individual rationality. As Dean notes (2019: 77), comrade is 'a relation, not an individual identity'. This means that only by virtue of collaboration does the figure of the comrade emerge. This builds on the ideas of equal humanity and equal (epistemic) standing. Since the comrade is a (social) relation, comradely critique is not stored within a person but emerges between people. Akin to Antonio Gramsci's notion of intellectuals occupying a social function as opposed to having inherent qualities, the comrade is only a comrade insofar as they act and think in a certain way. There are no eternal comrades as Dean emphasises. If someone diverges from the basic commitment to emancipation and the liberation of all and the collective struggle for the expansion of freedom from exploitation and domination, they are no longer a comrade and hence not entitled to being critiqued in a comradely way.

Common purpose is therefore crucial. This means that despite disagreements, certain basic commitments bind together comrades in the longer term. Indeed, through disagreement, the equal individual humanity of each participant is reinforced in light of a collective goal of emancipation. This is the basic idea of partisanship outlined above and across White and Ypi's work on this subject. Because partisanship ties together partisans – or in this case comrades – through a commitment to a cause, this can lead to intense fellow-feeling and togetherness that can weather the storm of momentary or occasional disagreements. Such partisan commitment fosters political engagement. This means that comradely critique is not intended to hinder or discourage further political action but rather to spur it. While critique from non-comrades can be pacifying and debilitating, leading to bouts of doubt and despair, comradely critique has the opposite function.

Dispels Fatalism

The critic has a duty to warn against cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011), that is to say the kind of optimism that cruelly ties its proponent to a harmful and ultimately perhaps even impossible cause. Thus, if the comrade is tied to a cruelly optimistic cause, they should be convinced to alter course. This applies to fatalism more broadly – whether fatalism of inevitability or fatalism of impossibility, that is, the conviction that radical social transformation is either inevitable qua a deterministic teleology or impossible qua the historical failures of such change. Often such fatalistic worldviews are chimeras. Therefore, the critic should try to encourage others to not take a totalising view of social transformation as either impossible or inevitable. (Re)inscribing a certain amount of human political agency into the process is healthy for reaching such emancipatory goals. Thus, in Angela Davis' (2014) words, 'you have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time' in order for the possibility of such transformation to come about.

Fatalistic tendencies are commonplace especially during periods of repeated defeats. For example, Gramsci identifies and repeatedly warns against this. Such tendencies function as a kind of defence mechanism – the activist might say that the reason for inaction or inertia is the impossibility of social transformation when in fact the real reason is a creeping fatalism caused by successive failures. One way to dispel such fatalism is through a secularised political faith (Slothuus, 2021). The purpose of comradely critique is therefore not to shut down discussion and disagreement, or even to brush it under the carpet, but to bring it out in the open. The ultimate purpose of this is in part to encourage political action and participation. Although action for action's sake, what Adorno calls 'actionism' (1982: 268), can be futile or even dangerous, there is value in theoretically informed political action – *praxis*. Critique is therefore comradely if it encourages the recipient to do something constructive and productive about the disagreement. If debilitating inertia is the consequence, that does not seem very comradely because ultimately the purpose should be to improve the understanding of important oppressions or injustices and the way to resolve them.

Non-Comradely and Uncomradely Critique

Having explicated comradely critique, I now turn to its rivals: non-comradely and uncomradely critique. Considering these is important in its own right, but it also apprehends some of the potential objections to the vision of comradely critique I have portrayed so far. While they bear some relation to hostile and neutral critique I briefly mentioned earlier, they are nevertheless distinct.

Non-comradely critique is simply the kind of critique that does not adhere to the components I set out above: it is not undertaken in good faith; it does not affirm the equal humanity and standing of the addresser and addressee; it does not emanate from a principle of solidarity, collaboration and common purpose; and it does not dispel fatalism. Much if not most critique probably falls into this bracket, which highlights that comradely critique is oftentimes an ethos to aspire to rather than a black-and-white tick box exercise. This could appear as simply avoiding being unnecessarily rude and disrespectful. However, the problem runs deeper than mere lack of courtesy. Because comradely critique is not an aesthetic category but a political one, its components are not simply about how to address others but about what kind of principles undergird that

communication. In short, it is about interest. A non-comradely critique therefore might jeopardise the common interest of the critic and those with whom they act in solidarity.

A stronger and more dangerous problem is actively uncomradely critique. Here, all the components in comradely critique are not just absent but directly or indirectly attacked. There is not just an absence of good faith, there is the presence of bad faith. There is not just a lack of affirmation of equal humanity and equal standing but the overt disavowal of such equality – for example, through personal attacks or by appeal to superiority. Likewise, the principle of solidarity as the embodiment of common interest is forfeited. Perhaps the uncomradely critique expects something in return, seeks to advance the position of the critic as a paramount objective, or simply does not align with a shared interest. Even worse, it might seek self-gratification and self-aggrandisement, such that the purpose of the critique is really not about the concrete matter of disagreement but about improving the social position and authority of the critic. This is particularly rife in an era of neoliberal subjectivity, in which the entrepreneur of the self often engages in forms of social distinction to increase their individual standing or clout.

A different kind of uncomradely critique is the obfuscation of a divergence of interest, for example, when the professional class of activists who purport to act out of a common interest with the working class obfuscate the contradictions between their own class interest and that of the working class. In this sense, activists might be comrades with other activists, but not comrades with workers. The XR train example is particularly pertinent here. The anti-worker activism of blocking a commuter train to highlight climate change, or when XR equated the radically transformative Labour manifesto with the ongoing rule of the Conservatives during the 2019 UK election campaign point to this problem. This is precisely Adorno's hesitancy vis-à-vis the German student movement, which in his view exhibited similar tendencies. Such problems would need to be spelt out in more detail, but are outside the scope of my inquiry here. In short, what they might be doing is perhaps simply not comradely critique but something else altogether. However, what seems clear here is that two different forms of uncomradely critique exist – the first, of the neoliberal subject who acts out of a desire of self-gain, and the activist gone awry who does not act out of a desire of self-gain but misapprehends or misjudges the implications of their critique.

Comradely critique is not without problems. Judging whether a critique is comradely seems difficult. Separating the positionality of both the critic and the interpreter of the critic from the substance of the critique is not a straightforward task. Tailoring the critique differentially depending on its recipient can lead to sophistry and deception. Working from a position of epistemic superiority raises a potential problem of paternalism. However, the precondition of equality and sameness precludes this from qualifying as genuinely comradely critique, and the critical theory literature has long grappled with responding to the charge of paternalism (Geuss, 1981: 82-85). Moreover, since I deliberately eschew the need for a definition of comradely critique, acts of interpretation foster disagreement on when a critique is comradely or not. Yet precisely such disagreement is what keeps a spirit of critique alive. Likewise, the role of intention is not fully clear – is it sufficient for a comrade to intend their critique to be comradely, even if it does not actually accomplish the components outlined above? Similarly, can a critique be accidentally comradely? Does intent matter at all? Likewise, comradely critique is certainly not a panacea for the struggle for emancipation. Comrades are not necessarily better people than anyone else, and are humans with flaws who make mistakes. Comradely critique is therefore also not infallible.

Illustration: Marcuse and Adorno

I now illustrate what comradely critique can look like in practice. In their posthumously published 1969 letters of correspondence on the German student movement (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999; Kraushaar, 1998: 574–575, 600–603, 624–625, 648–655, 671; Leslie, 1999), Marcuse and Adorno embody distinct positions on the efficacy of activism; the role of police, law, the state and critique vis-à-vis social movements. Despite their overall shared commitment to emancipatory politics, they vociferously disagree on how to parse the student movement. Adorno's pessimism about activism and his collusion with the police against occupying students was denounced by Marcuse, despite their enduring friendship, which gives an important insight into a more amicable position on the politics of resistance and emancipation. Yet their letters demonstrate disagreement on tactics, interpretation and particulars given overall shared contours. This is an instance of comradely critique illustrating its promises and pitfalls alike. This is not meant to be an example of the ideal form of comradely critique, simply a prominent real-world example that helps ground my more abstract preceding argument.

The 1960s German student movement was heavily inspired by the Frankfurt School (Müller-Dooch, 2009: 448ff) yet exposed rifts between the Frankfurt theorists – particularly Adorno and Marcuse (Kundnani, 2018: 221). They disagreed particularly on (1) the relationship between theory and praxis, (2) the extent to which West Germany was in a revolutionary situation in the 1960s and (3) the contemporary relevance of the Nazi past (Kundnani, 2018: 221–222). Initially sympathetic to the students, Adorno soon accused the students of authoritarianism and even fascism. Eventually, the students turned against the Frankfurt School, accusing them of authoritarianism in turn. In contrast to Adorno's hostility, Marcuse was more sympathetic to the students, partly explaining the disagreements in their private correspondence. Rather than a substantive analysis of these disagreements, I turn to the form and principles undergirding the critique itself.

First, Adorno presumes that Marcuse's lack of response is down to a 'natural or social . . . catastrophe' as opposed to Marcuse's reticence (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999: 123–124). In his response a month and a half later, Marcuse prefaces his criticism with a point of mutual good faith and common purpose: 'what came to light at no point contradicted what you wrote to me. It simply expanded it' (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999: 125), despite quite strong disagreement. Indeed, Adorno seeks congeniality when emphasising that 'I know that we are quite close on the question of the relation between theory and practice' (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999: 127), despite this being quite a stretch – Adorno and Marcuse are very far apart on this question, as their separate writings as well as the very correspondence reveal.

Common cause and solidarity are furthermore established by Adorno's invocation of common memory: 'To re-use a word that made us both smile in days gone by' (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999: 132). At no point is this clearer than in what turns out to be the last letter on the German student movement between the two; Adorno's August letter:

I want to prevent a calamity. It really would be idiotic if a *serious* rift should develop between you on the one side and Max [Horkheimer] and me on the other, all because of this story. I cannot understand why you did not first get in contact with Max, once you heard about this, as usual, crassly distorted affair, in order to sort out the facts of the matter *before* reacting. By the way, I must tell you that I find the witch-hunt against you, and the amusement that it provides for our enemies, disgusting (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999: 135).

This underscores Adorno's insistence on avoiding letting political disagreement come between not just their friendship but their comradeship, too.

Disagreements between comrades will often be about interpretation or understanding as opposed to fundamental normative or political differences. Adorno works from a spirit of collaboration with Marcuse:

You [Marcuse] think that praxis – in its emphatic sense – is not blocked today; I think different. I would have to deny everything that I think and know about the objective tendency if I wanted to believe that the student protest movement in Germany had even the tiniest prospect of effecting a social intervention (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999: 131).

Adorno emphasises this by saying he thinks differently as opposed to saying Marcuse is wrong. This is repeated in the final sentence of Adorno's last letter, in which he states: 'In puncto [concerning] simplification I hold a *completely* different view – just as I did towards Brecht in his time – but I cannot go into that today' (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999: 136). By reiterating that he simply holds a different view – even if this is a 'completely different view' – Adorno is not disputing their basic agreement.

Furthermore, Adorno stresses that 'our disagreements really do demand unlimited discussions' (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999: 128), emphasising the importance of comradely seeking common ground. Indeed, when Marcuse points out his disagreement with Adorno on whether to call the police on occupying students, he notes that 'It is indeed true that the police should "not be abstractly demonized." And, of course, I too would call the police in certain situations' (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999: 129). This is a comradely way of prefacing a criticism with a common point of agreement, irrespective of whether the substantive point is befitting of a comrade. Rather than saying Marcuse is wrong, Adorno simply suggests that he thinks differently to him: 'The crux of our controversy . . . You think that praxis – in its emphatic sense – is not blocked today; I think differently . . . and here too we must differ' (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999: 131). Indeed, in Marcuse's response to this point, he advances his own view as genuinely open-ended questions rather than definite statements (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999: 134).

To be clear, this correspondence is not a perfect example of comradely critique. It should be an ethos or an aspiration, not a black-and-white blueprint. For example, when Adorno scorns Marcuse for not heeding his words, he explains it in this way: 'It seems to me that it is virtually impossible to form an opinion about the affair from six thousand miles away; and you did so without even listening to me'. This conveys a feeling of betrayal, yet it therefore also indicates a high standard of expectation from Adorno towards Marcuse – Adorno is expecting comradely behaviour from Marcuse, namely, taking seriously his narrative. Likewise, when Marcuse somewhat disparagingly notes that:

our (old) theory has an internal political content, an internal political dynamic, that today, more than ever before, compels us to concrete political positions. That does not mean – as you ascribe to me in your *Spiegel* interview – giving 'practical advice'. I have never done that (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999: 123).

Here he corrects Adorno in fairly strong terms about a misjudgement. Yet he succeeds this sentence with shifting to the plural 'we' with Adorno, 'in order to still be our "old Institute," we have to write and act differently today than in the thirties' thus indicating common purpose and solidarity. This occurs again later: 'We should have the theoretical courage not to identify the violence of liberation with the violence of repression, all

subsumed under the general category of dictatorship' (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999: 134–135). This suggests a comradely foundation of shared visions of emancipation.

It is clear that Adorno and Marcuse work from a common point of departure, not just as friends but also comrades. They disagree respectfully, as equals and without denigrating each other, working from an initial position of good faith without assuming the other is engaging in sophistry or manipulation. Although disagreeing on the value of action in particular circumstances, with Adorno showing a strong disdain for actionism, they constantly seek productive ways to theorise the overcoming of capitalist liberal democracy – even when they disagree with the students' strategy. Although this is by no means a perfect example, and the correspondence could be interpreted as less comradely, it nevertheless shows how two comrades can engage in a difficult discussion on a thorny subject without giving up on the basic principles and commitments of what it means to be a comrade.

Conclusion

In this article, I have outlined the need for comradely critique and how to practice it. This common activist term has not been given sufficient scholarly attention yet can inform the work of critical theorists and activists alike. Because the critique is liberated from the oppressive demand to convince someone of the basic presuppositions of the position, it can cut straight to the chase of the specific disagreement, yet must aspire to the comradely ethos outlined above. The Adorno–Marcuse illustration and XR examples demonstrate the importance of the private–public distinction in comradely critique. While public-facing critique must reckon with being exposed to non-comrades and thus must be less caustic, private-facing critique can be more partisan and affective. More work is needed to fully understand and defend this idea, for instance, by engaging with a much wider range of primary material and selection of cases. I therefore open up rather than shut down an important discussion on how to practice critique, which values and principles to relate to one's comrades, partisans and fellow travellers. In these difficult times, practicing critique in a comradely way is necessary to strengthen struggles for emancipation. While critique is not a panacea for emancipation, it must form part of emancipatory struggle. I therefore hope this article will be subjected to critique – perhaps even comradely critique.

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